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517 The Mongol, Turkish and Persian wars seared the vivid intellectual life, as they scarred the valleys of the Georgian Kingdom. The first Renaissance of the twelfth century flowered in Georgia, as in the West—but ruin choked the delicate growth of a splendid and an individual culture. Sargis Tmogveli, poet and philosopher, was the last representative of a school of originality and promise.

In the seventeenth century, Chardin, in his none too friendly appraisal of the Georgians, allows himself to say that they—

> "Are Naturally very Witty, Nor would there be more Learned Men, or more Ingenious Masters in the World, were they best improv'd by the knowledge of Arts and Sciences." [1]

814 Even when he wrote, a few rare spirits were preparing the meagre Georgian Renaissance which struggled to overcome the political conditions of the early eighteenth century. King Wakhtangi imported the first printing-press from Wallachia and in the midst of invasion and petty revolts inspired the revision of the historical and juridical works which bear his name. His son, Wakhushti, pursued his father's courses. After some soldiering and politics in Georgia, he settled down, an impoverished refugee in Moscow, living with a large family in lodgings in the Presna Street, a neighbourhood which was for generations much favoured by the Georgian community. He interested himself in the production of the beautiful Georgian edition of the Bible, which was published in Moscow in 1742. He dabbled also in religious and philosophical studies, but his real and valuable contribution to the advancement of knowledge was the work which he completed in 1745—*The Geographical Description of Georgia*. The work contained a long introduction on the customs of the Georgians, and a consideration of the country in provinces, with a mass of topographical detail and twenty-two manuscript maps. As a production of the mid-eighteenth century, the whole geographical work of Wakhushti not only represented a great advance on any other material which had been written up to that date, but it may certainly be regarded as among the most competent and scientific productions of the time.

The same period saw the revival of the exact sciences in Georgia. Saba Sulkhan Orbeliani travelled in Europe at the end of the seventeenth century; he composed the first Georgian dictionary and himself illuminated it; and in his *Book of Wisdom*

[1] *Chardin* (1686 ed.), p. 190.

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ont naturellement beaucoup d'esprit; l'on en feroit des gens savants et des grands maîtres, si on les élevoit dans les sciences et dans les arts; mais l'éducation qu'on leur donne étant fort méchante, et n'ayant que de mauvais exemples, ils deviennent très ignorans et très vicieux. Ils sont fourbes, fripons, perfides, traîtres, ingrats, superbes. . . . Outre ces vices de l'esprit, ils ont ceux de la sensualité les plus sales, l'ivrognerie et la luxure. Ils se plongent d'autant plus avant dans ces saletés, qu'elles sont communes et nullement déshonnêtes en Géorgie. . . . Pour le reste, les Géorgiens ont de la civilité et de l'humanité, et de plus ils sont graves et modérés."

The life of the Georgian gentleman was passed entirely in hunting, in war and in the satisfaction of personal feuds; from the age of four years he was brought up to horsemanship and the use of arms; every man was a past-master with the bow and lance. They hunted the jackal and the fox with hounds, but their favourite pastime was hawking, their principal game being cranes, herons and pheasants. After the chase the company would give themselves up to feasting and drinking. A main item of diet was *gom*, a kind of porridge made with millet, which formed almost the sole nourishment of the peasants, and was a much-appreciated course at the tables of the gentry. They had little fish except tunny and salt-fish imported from Trebizond and Kaffa, but ate many varieties of meat, the most abundant of which was pork, then venison, beef, mutton and hare.

At any great feast it was a point of honour to become intoxicated, and he who failed in this respect was considered to be a poor fellow. The lower classes, however, were often miserably fed, and the standard of their living was a very low one.

Georgian was a literary language, at least from the time of Pharnavaz, who is said to have introduced the Georgian alphabet, derived, like the Armenian, through the Pahvli and Zend, from the Aramæan. The earliest extant examples of Georgian writing are copies of the Bible, lives of the Saints and other sacred works.

The Mongol and later Mussulman wars effectually checked the natural development of Georgian intellectual life, and to the separation from the philosophical and educational influences of Western Europe must be attributed much of the illiteracy, coarseness and lack of idealism of the Georgian aristocracy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. What little literary culture there was in the country was the preserve of

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517 the monasteries and, more particularly, of the small colonies of Italian Capuchin monks. With the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, a literary revival began, due partly to renewed facilities for communication with Western Europe. In 1712 King Vakhtang VI set up a printing-press in Tiflis and began the collection and publication of mediæval Georgian poems and romances, while under his direction *The Georgian Chronicle* was edited and published. Vakhtang in fact initiated a patriotic literary renaissance, which was a counterpart to the contemporary political reaction against the Mussulman overlords of Georgia.

538 It was however in poetry and in romanticism that the Georgian mind found its highest expression, and it is in the descriptions of colour, of nature, and of the emotions of the senses that Georgian writers have achieved the most beautiful passages in their language. The lyrical compositions of the great Georgian poets show us the best side of the national character—a love of the dance and of music and song and pleasant company, a delight in bright colours and rich stuffs, a kindliness for horses and wild creatures, an enthusiasm for fresh air and for the chase, an easy though sincere sentimentalism and a gay fatalistic philosophy of life—all are reflected in the literary masterpieces of the land. The most renowned of these mediæval romancers were Shaveli (all of whose works have been lost), Shakhrukhzade, Rustaveli, Khoneli, and Tmokveli. Of these Rustaveli is the best-remembered, and his masterpiece, *The Man in the Panther's Skin*, a lyrical romance of 1,600 quatrains, has survived complete.

Rustaveli died, according to legend, in the same year as Thamara[1]; with her passed the form, with him much of the spirit, of the Great Age of Georgia. But through all the dark centuries of the Mongol and Mussulman wars his poem survived. It lived as the expression of the national philosophy of the Georgians; it was repeated and quoted in camp and in the hour of battle; recited on many a shady balcony during the hot afternoons of seven hundred years; its vulgarised quatrains were bawled by drunken voices across many princely dining-boards; every young bride was required to know it by heart before her marriage; and to this day peasants may be heard singing broken snatches of it as they follow the plough or garner in the corn.

1 [i.e. Queen Thamara (d. 1212); see cat. 116, p 173 -- Analyst]